

**The Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS)  
Public Library Survey  
Statistical Collection and Reporting  
Procedures and Schedule**

During the past few years there has been significant turnover in State Data Coordinators (SDC). This is unlikely to change in the future. Each SDC is encouraged to develop a procedures manual to help the next SDC in their state. The following procedure, based on information from Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia, is provided as an example.

Reliable, consistent public library statistics provide both the basis for effective management and continuing assessment of the status of public libraries. These statistics must be collected, analyzed and disseminated annually at the community, state and federal levels.

The Federal-State Cooperative System Public Library Survey is a state and federal partnership to provide a system to collect comparable data about public libraries in the United States. Unlike other National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, the FSCS Public Library Survey is a grass-roots cooperative project. The State Libraries agree to collect specified data as part of the state's annual data collection process. The data is compiled by the State Library Agency and submitted to NCES. A variety of federal agencies, the American Library Association and the State Library Agencies all contribute to the success of the program. The roles of each contributor are:

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Mandated to acquire and diffuse useful statistical information on subjects connected with education. NCES works with the Steering committee to plan the public library data collection. NCES works with the U.S. Census Bureau to compile, edit and publish the data.

National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS). Serves as a liaison to the library community, organizes meetings and training workshops, provides technical assistance, monitors trends, and advises NCES on policy matters.

State Library Agencies (SLA): Agree to appoint a State Data Coordinator and to collect and submit data for each public library (Administrative Entity) and for each outlet of the library.

The responsibilities of the position of SDC can be found at:

<http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/aboutFSCS/sdcjob-2.html>

A list of all SDCs can be found at:

[http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/aboutFSCS/SDC\\_Directory.pdf](http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/aboutFSCS/SDC_Directory.pdf)

Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA): The Chair of the Research and Statistics Committee serves on the FSCS Steering Committee to provide advice and guidance on behalf of COSLA.

American Library Association (ALA): The Director, Office for Research and Statistics, American Library Association serves on the FSCS Steering Committee to provide advice and guidance on national data needs.

Bureau of the Census: Plays a key role in data collection/compilation and processing.

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS): Serves on the FSCS Steering Committee to provide advice and guidance on data needs.

### **FSCS Steering Committee**

The FSCS Steering Committee works to coordinate all of the states' public library statistical surveys within the framework of FSCS, ensuring uniformity of collection for agreed on data. Each of the partners of FSCS is represented on the Steering Committee. The State Library Agencies are represented on the Steering Committee by a representative of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (Chair of COSLA Research and Statistics committee) and 5 State Data Coordinators (SDCs) elected by the states, and 3 members appointed by NCES. The appointed members' duties include serving as secretary and chairs of two of the Subcommittees.

There are 4 subcommittees

- The Data Collection Subcommittee: Supports the continued development and improvement of the electronic data submission software.

- The Data Conference Subcommittee: Identifies State Data Coordinator training needs and plans the annual FSCS Professional Development Conference.

- The Data Elements Subcommittee: Continually develops, reviews and refines data elements to ensure consistency, reliability and data for effective management and continuing assessment of the status of public libraries

- The Data Use Subcommittee: Promotes awareness and use of NCES web-based tools and NCLIS website, monitors use of FSCS data, identifies exemplary uses of the data and selects the Eckard award winners.

## Data Collection Process

Each State Library Agency agrees to appoint a State Data Coordinator, to establish procedures for collecting data from public libraries within the state and to submit data annually. The first step in the process is for each state to develop a data collection instrument that includes all of the FSCS data elements as well as any additional data elements needed at the state and/or local level. A history of the FSCS data elements 1990 – current can be found on the NCLIS website at:

<http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/SDCmain/SDCresources/HistoryofDataElements.pdf>

The State Data Coordinator (SDC) is responsible for

- ensuring all FSCS data elements and their definitions are included in the state library survey of public libraries.
- monitoring response and completion of the survey
- providing assistance to libraries having difficulties with the survey
- contacting libraries that have not responded to the survey by deadline
- determining the latest population estimate of the legal service area of each library
- reviewing the data for accuracy and completeness (see below)
- compiling and submitting data to FSCS
- voting on proposed new and/or revised data elements (see below)
- attending and participating in the Annual FSCS Conference (December)

When data is submitted to the state, the review process begins. **The review and follow-up process is very time consuming but is essential. Allow at least 8 weeks for follow-up.**

During the review process, the SDC:

- follows-up on any data edit issues identified with the public libraries
- Provides explanation of edit checks to FSCS

Data edit checks have been developed by Census and the Data Collection Subcommittee to ensure the receipt of the highest quality data possible. Data edit checks are a useful tool to identify items that need clarification or revision. Edit checks can alert you to potential data errors, or unusual data patterns. There are historical edit checks and relationship edit checks. For instance, an edit check will be generated by either the survey software or the federal data submission software if a library's collection is 20,000 items one year and 100,000 the next. Likewise, if a library has 500 annual visitors and 10,000 computer users, an edit check will be generated.

Help is available

- Mentor – Each state is assigned to a member of the Steering Committee, who is responsible for contacting new SDCs and providing assistance as needed.

<http://www.nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/steeringFSCS/Mentors.pdf>

- NCLIS – Maintain web sites and facilitate assistance  
<http://www.nclis.gov/survey.htm>
- Census – Assist with software and technology issues.
- NCES – assist states that are experiencing serious data collection problems.

### **Voting on New, Revised, and Deleted data items**

SDCs may present proposals to add, delete, and/or revise data items to the Steering Committee and at the Annual Conference. Each proposal should include: identification of the proposed addition, change, or deletion, a clear rationale for the proposed action, identification of data collection methodologies for local libraries and SDCs, and a definition with notes for each new or revised proposal.

Time is scheduled at the Annual Discussion to discuss proposals. Forty percent (40%) of the SDCs attending the conference must endorse a proposal before it is added to a ballot.

The ballot is mailed to state libraries in late March or early April. Forty five (45) states must vote to certify the election. Items must be approved by two-thirds (66%) of the states voting.

Each SDC is responsible for submitting a vote for his/her state. Each state develops policies and procedures for submission of the vote.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Step 1 – Examine annual collection instrument to ensure data items required by FSCS are included and definitions are updated.

Step 2 – Revise the data collection instrument as necessary to ensure data collected meets FSCS needs as well as any identified state and local needs.

- a. Consider adding data items endorsed by SDCs at the annual FSCS conference.
- b. Revise definitions, incorporating any changes needed
- c. Incorporate edit checks.
- d. Notify the public libraries of new and or revised data items as soon as possible.

Step 3 – Establish a deadline for collection of data from public libraries.

- a. The Library Director is responsible for submission of the data. Notices should be sent to the Director, unless someone else at the library has been designated as the contact.
- b. The timetable for collection of the data should be the same each year.
- c. Create a calendar for the data collection and reporting process.

Step 4 – Monitors receipt of data from libraries

- a. Consider creating a mailing list and an electronic contact list of public library directors if the state library doesn't have one.
- b. Four weeks prior to the deadline set by the state: contact libraries that have not submitted data to determine status and to offer encouragement and assistance.
- c. Two weeks prior to deadline set by the state: follow-up contact libraries that have not submitted data.
- d. Contact the library's director when data is not received by the deadline.
- e. Follow-up with the library's governing authority as needed (suggest within 2-4 weeks of established deadline).

Step 5 – Verify the population of the library's legal service area:

- a. Submit the latest population estimates for the library's legal service area to FSCS. Data is available from Census web site:  
<http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php>  
or from the state Data Center within each state.  
<http://www.census.gov/sdc/www>
- b. Population figures used within the state may be different from those submitted to FSCS.

Step 6 – Review data for quality, consistency and compliance with Edit Checks established by the Steering Committee and Census and any additional edit checks developed by the state.

- a. Establish a schedule to ensure timely follow-through on edit checks
- b. Send edit follow-up questions to the designated library staff member and/or library director.
  - 1) If edit issue not resolved in 5 working days (or by date agreed), contact library and offer assistance.
  - 2) Follow-up with the library's director and or governing authority as necessary.
- c. Compile data including analysis and send to libraries for a final review.

Step 7 – Import data into FSCS software (Note: this serves as an additional edit check.)

- a. Have data ready to import when the software is received.
- b. Contact mentor and/or Census immediately upon encountering any problems.

Step 8 – Submit data to FSCS.

Step 9 – Respond to Census and NCES follow-ups within 5 working days.

**EXAMPLE OF A TIMELINE:  
Group 1 Libraries (July – June fiscal year):**

October – December:	The SDC meets with Library Development Services staff to analyze and revise survey questions for upcoming fiscal year.
January – April:	<p>Update State Data Collection instrument</p> <p>Include any data element and definition additions/revisions adopted by the FSCS.</p> <p>Consider adding any data elements proposed at the December FSCS Conference endorsed by the SDCs.</p> <p>Add/delete/revise any locally needed/required data elements</p> <p>Add/delete/revise edit checks as needed for FSCS or to meet local needs.</p> <p>Revise of any directions and instructions</p> <p>Vote on proposed new and/or revised data elements.</p>
April – May:	Test the library's data collection tool (internally and externally)
July 1:	Notify libraries to submit data to the State Library. Provide instructions for submission of the data and the deadline for submission of the data. (Recommendation: Give libraries approximately 2 months to complete the survey.)
Sept.– Nov.	Collect, review and compile data. Provide assistance to libraries as needed.
December:	<p>Import data into WebPLUS (federal software). Run edits.</p> <p>Import data immediately</p> <p>Edit follow-up contacts are made as needed</p> <p>Attend FSCS Conference</p>
February:	Submit data to NCES (Census)

**Awards:**

The Steering Committee presents Awards for timely submission of accurate data, for innovative and exemplary use of FSCS and public library data, and for statistical research by library school students using public library data.

<http://nclis.gov/statsurv/surveys/fscs/awardFSCS/awardsFSCS.html>

The Francis Keppel Award, named for a distinguished U.S. Commissioner of Education, is presented to State Library Agencies that have excelled in the completeness, promptness, and high quality of the local public library data collected, edited and submitted to NCES.

The Helen M. Eckard Award is presented to honor innovative and exemplary use of FSCS and Public Library data. This award is named for a NCES staff member who provided outstanding leadership as a professional librarian for the support of the Library Statistics Program.

The Mary Jo Lynch Award, named for the former director of the ALA Office of Research and Statistics who was a major force in the establishment of the FSCS for Public Library Data, is presented to a library school student for statistical research using public library data collected at the state and national level.

**Data Use Tools Available:**

NCES has developed a Compare Public Libraries, software program for comparing libraries. Compare Public Libraries allows users to compare one library (the library of interest) with similar libraries (the comparison group). The tool is available at the following NCES website:

<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/compare/FocusLibrarySearch.asp>